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## THE BOARD OF CONTROL IN MINNESOTA.

At the National Conference of Charities and Corrections in Topeka, last year, a historical sketch of the work and growth of the Board of Corrections and Charities for Minnesota since 1883 was presented, and contained the following statement :

At this rate the Board of Corrections and Charities will soon be so imbedded in the legislation of the state, and will be so vital an organ in its work, that one would about as soon propose to dissolve the state government as to dispense with the board.

Nevertheless such is the swift-moving iconoclasm of American political life that in less than one year thereafter not only is that board abolished, but also the entire list of governing boards for all charitable and penal institutions in the state, and their functions are assumed by a newly created Board of Control. In no other country in the world could such a revolution have been so quickly and so easily effected. Such is the mobility of American institutions.

The Board of Control consists of three members, appointed by the governor to serve for six years, one vacancy occurring every two years. The salary is \$3,500 a year, traveling expenses are paid, and the board is authorized to employ such clerical assistance as may be needed. Heads of institutions are appointed by the board, and all subordinates are appointed by the superintendents. The financial control of the educational institutions is given to the board also, though it has nothing to do with the instruction or the appointment of their officers. All the powers and duties heretofore belonging to the boards of trustees, as well as to the Board of Corrections and Charities, now belong to the Board of Control.

Such a radical change of policy would be occasioned, so the student of public affairs might suppose, by some acute condition of distrust in prevailing methods and agencies. But such a supposition would be wholly unfounded. There had been very little public discussion of the subject, and there was absolutely

no public opinion demanding the change. The institutions of the state have been managed, in the opinion of all competent persons, as well as those of any state in the union. Political factors were but remotely influential, and permanence in office as well as ability in management characterized the superintendents. The state Board of Corrections and Charities was one of the most efficient in the whole country, and the esteem in which it has been held is clearly shown by the fact that at nearly every session of the legislature since its organization new and important duties have been imposed upon it, and increased appropriations have been made for its necessary expenses. The secretaries, only two of them since its organization, were both men of capacity and industry, who enjoyed the public confidence to a remarkable degree. The various boards of trustees were composed for the most part of eminent and respectable citizens who from pride in their work and from a desire to serve the public had given much time and toil to their duties without compensation. No scandal of any kind has occurred in the treatment of the wards of the state in many years.

Why, then, should any change have occurred in the management? It was brought about mainly by the exertions and advocacy of Hon. Robert C. Dunn, auditor of state, who will deserve the credit for success, and who must share at least the responsibility of any adverse fortune, coming to the new system.

In his report to the legislature of 1899 Mr. Dunn recommended the appointment of a committee to investigate the subject of the management of state institutions, alleging that Wisconsin and Iowa had saved hundreds of thousands of dollars by consolidating the management of all institutions under a single board. The legislature did not follow the suggestion, and it has been stated that the reason for the failure to do so was to be found in the fact that the legislature was Republican, while Governor Lind, who was a Republican-Populist-Democrat, would have the privilege of appointing the first members of the new board, should one be created.

Whether this be true or not, it is certain that the message of Governor Lind to the same legislature discussed the whole

question with great candor, presenting with singular ability the argument for and against the change. He thought it beyond question that, if all the purchases for the institutions were made by a single agency, money would be saved, there would be no strife between the different institutions, and the reports from them would no longer be colored by local bias or interests. Members of separate boards were often lobbyists for their particular institution, without considering the interests of the state at large.

The dangers of the board of control plan were thus summarized :

. . . that the appointments are as likely to take the political complexion as in the make-up of the separate boards. If inefficiency or lack of probity find place, the resulting danger is greater because of the greater power. There is also greater danger of stagnation, and that a demoralizing and bureaucratic spirit may gain ascendancy.

In the same message he said : "Our Board of Corrections and Charities has done, and is doing, valuable work, and is exercising a wholesome control over our institutions." In a public address given later he repeated this testimony in a very warm indorsement of Secretary Jackson. It may be well to say here that at no time in the discussion was this board adversely criticised. Mr. Dunn and the present governor both agreed that this board should continue, even if the board of control plan was adopted, but it failed in the legislature.

Governor Lind recommended as the most important feature of the Wisconsin and Iowa system the matter of analyzed accounts, so that a prompt and correct comparison might be made in the expenditures of the various institutions. This suggestion was approved by the legislature, and an additional appropriation to the Board of Corrections and Charities was made for that purpose. This was the entering wedge for the new method of management.

Mr. Dunn renewed his recommendation for a board of control in his message to the legislature of 1901. Governor Van Sant also recommended the board of control in his annual message. The argument of each was chiefly the saving to be made in purchasing supplies.

Little discussion of the proposed change occurred in the newspapers, and the opposition to the measure was made chiefly by the *Pioneer Press*, which suggested that the humanitarian side would be best conserved by the present system, and that the financial advantages hoped for could be better secured by a purchasing agent, leaving the general management as it was. It was argued by some that the chief reason for the change lay in the desire to build up a political machine that would control the hundreds of employés of the various institutions. This objection does not seem to have lost any votes to the cause. Governor Van Sant had suggested a "non-partisan" board in his message, and a provision that not more than two of the members should belong to the same political party was in the first draft of the bill, but was stricken out by amendment. During the progress of the measure in the legislature the governor appointed a special committee of three citizens to investigate the board of control system, and other methods of administration in adjacent states. The committee consisted of Hon. C. A. Morey, member of the Republican state central committee; Hon. W. E. Lee, ex-speaker of the house of representatives; and ex-Senator A. W. Leavitt; the first two being Republicans and the last being a "gold Democrat," but a supporter of the Republican party in the last two general elections. Mr. Morey was the personal representative of Governor Van Sant on the committee that managed his campaign. The committee made a favorable report, the bill became a law, and the committee was then appointed as the first Board of Control in the same order in which it had been named as the committee of investigation on the merits of the proposed system. The committee in its report suggested that a section be added to the bill prohibiting political influences in the institutions. The section was added.

It is proper to state that controversy arose as to the correctness of the financial comparisons which showed a large saving in favor of the board of control system. All who have familiarity with statistics know that to have real value variations must occur under substantially identical conditions. This obvious rule was not strictly followed in the discussion.

Aside from the financial argument, perhaps the most potent reason for the change was the desire to suppress the insolent local lobby which persisted in regarding each institution as a gratuity from the state to the town in which it was placed, and therefore to be managed by local wisdom in local interests.

In the appointment of the Board of Control it is said that the cities of the state were not to be "recognized" because they had already received more "patronage" than they were entitled to have, and therefore the members must come from the country. In spite of the infelicity of having made use of the same men for investigating the merits of a system of which they were to be beneficiaries, the general impression is that the men composing the new board are capable and honest, and that the system will be fairly tried on its merits.

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